

RICH, EMILY, M.A. "Scope for Elbow and Mind": Industrial Labor and Working-Class Culture in the Nonfiction of Jack Hilton. (2017)
Directed by Dr. Ben Clarke. 37 pp.

Jack Hilton was a working-class author who frequently expressed ambivalent attitudes toward modernity and industrialism. He often seems nostalgic for a pre-industrial past, yet simultaneously acknowledges the material benefits of industrialism and the difficulties of rural life. Many of Hilton's critiques of industry focus on the effects of mechanized or "rationalized" labor on the intellectual and cultural development of the working class. But while Hilton critiques industrial labor, he is careful not to romanticize labor in other fields, acknowledging the oppressive nature of all wage labor and its negative effects on culture. In this essay, I outline Hilton's critique of rationalized work and its effects on working-class culture. Then, I contrast his criticism of industry with his depictions of other types of work, including both agricultural labor and work in skilled trades, highlighting how Hilton problematizes his own critique of rationalization. I conclude by detailing Hilton's proposed solutions to labor's negative effects on culture, and explore the extent to which his concern for working-class culture informed his support of socialism, which he believed would provide working-class people with the economic stability and leisure time necessary for intellectual and artistic pursuits. Hilton's materialist analysis of his own cultural moment seems to anticipate cultural studies methodology, positioning Hilton as part of the intellectual pre-history of the discipline. Moreover, Hilton's refusal to separate cultural and political critique provides a model of cultural studies as an active political practice.

RICH, EMILY, M.A. "To Pick Out for Oneself, To Choose": Ezra Pound, Carl Schmitt, and the Poetics of Sovereignty. (2017)
Directed by Dr. Ben Clarke. 34 pp.

This essay explores the apparent contradiction between Ezra Pound's foundational role in the formulation of modernist poetics and his active engagement in fascist political projects beginning in the interwar years and continuing through World War II. Recently, many scholars have worked to document the extent of Pound's investment in fascist projects and to explicate the political and social content of much of his poetry. Yet the question still stands: what connections exist between Pound's understandings of poetics and politics? This essay seeks to address this question by examining Pound's inter-war nonfiction prose. I read these texts alongside the work of German judicial theorist Carl Schmitt, focusing on his theory of sovereignty. First, I outline Schmitt's definition of sovereignty and the relationship between a sovereign's power and his use of language. Using Schmitt as a theoretical framework, I then turn to Pound's early articulations of the role of the artist and the implications of that role on his creation of a paratactic poetic style. By creating a new poetic language that denies the figurative, Pound rescues poetry from the flaws of discursivity by allowing it to approach the status of action. His articulation of aesthetic problems in terms of sovereignty carries over into his political writing and eventual support of fascist dictators like Mussolini. By using Schmitt's work to explicate Pound's, I also demonstrate the relevance of Schmitt's judicial theory to literary studies and provide a framework for further investigations of the political implications of modernist poetics.

“SCOPE FOR ELBOW AND MIND”: INDUSTRIAL LABOR AND WORKING-
CLASS CULTURE IN THE NONFICTION OF JACK HILTON
AND
“TO PICK OUT FOR ONESELF, TO CHOOSE”: EZRA POUND, CARL SCHMITT,
AND THE POETICS OF SOVEREIGNTY

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“SCOPE FOR ELBOW AND MIND”: INDUSTRIAL LABOR AND WORKING-CLASS CULTURE IN THE NONFICTION OF JACK HILTON

Jack Hilton was a working-class author, plasterer, and member of a number of radical political organizations, including the plasterer's union, the Socialist Labour Party, and the National Unemployed Workers Movement (Charlton 142). After attending classes with the Workers Educational Association, he published his first book, the autobiographical *Caliban Shrieks*, in 1935. Hilton then attended Ruskin College for two years, eventually publishing a number of both fiction and nonfiction texts (143). He was acquainted with both Jack Common, author of *Kiddar's Luck* and *The Ampersand*, and John Middleton Murray, a prominent socialist and editor of *The Adelphi*, and briefly corresponded with George Orwell. Though no longer as well-known as his contemporaries, his inimitable prose style proves his value as an author, and his unique perspective provides a window into early twentieth-century working-class life.

In many of his texts, Hilton expresses ambivalent attitudes toward modernity and industrialism. He often seems nostalgic for a pre-industrial past, writing lingering descriptions of rural landscapes and contrasting them to the ugliness of industrial scenes. Yet elsewhere he acknowledges the material benefits of industrialism and the grinding poverty of farm laborers. Many of Hilton's critiques of industry focus on the effects of mechanized or "rationalized" labor on the intellectual and cultural development of the working class. Concerned with the cultural effects of labor, Hilton explores the ways in

which working class culture is affected by work in heavy and light industries in both urban and rural areas.

Hilton was especially critical of rationalized factory work, claiming that the mindless, repetitive nature of mechanized labor deadened the minds of workers. He believed the poor working conditions in modern factories pre-disposed workers to consume low-quality, mass-produced entertainment, replacing out a vibrant, already-existing working-class culture. But while Hilton critiques industrial labor, he is careful not to romanticize labor in other fields, acknowledging the oppressive nature of all wage labor and its negative effects on culture. His appreciation for working-class cultural forms and his belief that all work under capitalism inhibits the creation and enjoyment of this culture were major contributors to his support of socialism, which he believed would provide working-class people with the economic stability and leisure time necessary for intellectual and artistic pursuits.

Though Hilton's writing spans numerous genres, this essay focuses on only his major inter-war nonfiction texts: *Caliban Shrieks* (1935), an autobiography of Hilton's early life and his experiences with unemployment, "A Plasterer's Life" (1938), an autobiographical essay detailing his entry into the world of work and his career as a plasterer, and *English Ways* (1940), a travel memoir describing a "walk from the Pennines to Epsom Downs in 1939." In this essay, I will explore Hilton's depictions of labor, especially his critiques of mechanized labor in "rationalized" light-industries. Though there has been little critical engagement with Hilton's work, a few scholars have

begun to explore Hilton's relationship with industrialism. Dan Charlton argues that a central theme of *English Ways* is the "cultural divide which separated 'traditional' (i.e.: mainly rural) England from 'modern' (i.e.: mainly neo-technic industrial) England" (Charlton 146). According to Andy Croft, "all Hilton's writings propose a constant criticism of mechanisation, speed-up, 'rationalisation' – of Industrialisation itself" (Croft 34). Expanding on the work of these scholars, I will focus on Hilton's critique of mechanized light-industrial work and its effects on the intellectual and cultural development of the working class. My exploration of working-class culture is founded on the broad definition of cultural activities that Hilton himself used, which included "citizenship, educational pursuits and the arts" (*English Ways* 85, hereafter abbreviated *EW*). First, I outline Hilton's critique of rationalized work and its effects on working-class culture. Then, I contrast his criticism of industry with his depictions of other types of work, including both agricultural labor and work in skilled trades, highlighting how Hilton problematizes his own critique of rationalization. I conclude by detailing Hilton's proposed solutions to labor's negative effects on culture, and explore the extent to which his concern for working-class culture informed his socialist political commitments.

Working-class cultural activities were a subject of much concern beginning in the Victorian era and continuing into the twentieth century. Questions of how to "reform" working-class culture to include more "rational" forms of recreation were popular among reformists on both the left and right (Waters 3-4). Typical of this genre of reform literature is Thomas Wright's 1881 essay, "On a Possible Popular Culture." Wright

argued that working-class men's "addiction to low and vitiating forms of reading remains as the most widely operating cause of the virtual non-existence of a popular culture." It may seem contradictory for Wright to simultaneously bemoan the "non-existence" of popular culture and criticize working-class reading habits. But Wright, like many of his fellow reformers, defines culture in very narrow terms (27). For Wright, a true "popular culture" would require the popular adoption of bourgeois art, especially literature. Wright's goal is for bourgeois literature to eventually replace the "trashy" novels popular among working-class readers (32). In order to combat the working-class "addiction" to "low" reading, Wright recommends the "judicious guidance" of young minds toward appropriate reading materials (31). By providing more "healthy and strengthening" reading materials to working-class boys, concerned adults can rectify the "plentiful lack of culture which characterizes the mass of the working-classes" (31). And while Wright does put some of the blame for what he considers the poverty of working-class culture on the new availability of "trashy" books and the "cram system" of schooling (32), he primarily blames the working-class for being "willing to read little else" than the "police intelligence of the lower types of weekly newspapers" (26).

Wright's essay is typical of cultural-improvement literature, both in its wholly negative portrayal of working-class culture and in its proposed solutions. Cultural reformers tended to take a patronizing attitude toward the working class, blaming what they perceived as the paucity of working-class culture on working people's poor cultural decisions. They believed that workers were unable to discern good literature from bad

amongst the overwhelming choices given them by the new mass-media, and that they therefore needed the guidance of concerned members of the bourgeoisie. To these reformers, working-class cultural behaviors were shaped solely by cultural factors, such as education, and could therefore be solved by cultural means alone. Unlike these reformers, who confined their explanations of working-class cultural habits to the cultural realm, Hilton sought “material explanations” for “cultural phenomena” (Croft 33). Well-versed in the socialist literature of his time, Hilton approached his analysis from a primarily economic and material perspective. Noticing changes in production and in labor conditions, he attempted to connect these changes to simultaneous trends in working-class cultural activities.

Mechanized Labor and Mass Culture

Hilton “regarded the decline of creative, satisfying work and its replacement by standardized, monotonous toil” as “the most important threat” to working-class physical and cultural “independence and well-being” (Charlton 151). During his travels collecting material for what would become *English Ways*, Hilton had the opportunity to see much of this “standardized, monotonous toil” in person. During his time in Derby, Hilton and his wife Mary were accompanied by a local man who showed them the sights of the town, including his former workplace:

He had been a clerk, and had worked in a room where there were comptometers, accounting machines, cash registers, and typewriters all rattling together at their routine rhythm. Amid the bustle and precision he had lost his identity. He had ceased to be a man; to have individuality. He had become an appendage to a

tapping machine, with no future to look forward to; only the sedentary grind of the eternal, roboticised present. (*EW* 56)

The image of a man surrounded by “comptometers, accounting machines, cash registers” is a striking one, and seems to neatly encapsulate Hilton’s fears regarding the introduction of mechanization into the workplace. Surrounded by the “bustle and precision” of new technology, workers risk losing their “identity” and “individuality” and becoming a mere “appendage” to a machine. The unwavering precision and seamless, unchanging motion of the machines requires the human operator to fit himself into their rhythm. This overwhelms and destroys the “individuality” and humanity of the worker. As Hilton later recounts, his guide’s fear of being turned into an unchanging, “sedentary” machine had eventually “soured” his mind against all the factories in Derby (56).

Hilton was not alone in disliking the “sedentary,” unchanging work created by mechanization. Orwell, a contemporary and occasional correspondent of Hilton’s, worried that if “mechanical progress” eliminated the need for manual labor, men would no longer have the “physical courage,” “strength,” “loyalty,” and “generosity” created by physical exertion and the attendant threat of bodily harm (194). He believed that complete mechanization would make the world “safe and soft” and create a “paradise of little fat men” (193). Hilton’s critique of rationalization certainly has similarities to Orwell’s dislike of sedentary, non-physical work.

While Orwell primarily criticized mechanization when it reduced the need for physical labor, Hilton’s critique of rationalization often includes work that requires

physical strength. Though Hilton appreciated those who could do physical work, his criticism of rationalization is based not on its reduction of physical exertion, but on its introduction of mind-numbing regularity and routine. In Oxford, Hilton visited the Morris Crowley car factory and observed the assembly-line method of car production. He described the process of painting the cars, which ended with each car being hand-polished:

The firm believe that laborious hand-rubbing is the best method for securing the smoothest surface. Each body is submitted to severe hand-rubbing by gangs of men repeatedly. The work is for strong men, and any omission to use elbow-grease would easily be discovered. It is a repetitive job of rub and sponge, suitable only for strong men who can labour unceasingly, and unthinkingly, and it must be boredom in its acutest form. (*EW* 176-7)

Hilton emphasizes that, despite taking place in a rationalized car factory, the job is still physically strenuous. But while the task does require what Orwell might call “physical courage,” it seems unlikely to encourage any of the virtues that Orwell believes attend such acts (194). Hilton demonstrates that it is the repetitive, mindless nature of efficient, rationalized work that makes it unbearable for the worker. For Hilton, the problem with rationalized factory work is not that it is physically undemanding, but that it is not intellectually stimulating. He reiterates this point when he describes this job again a few pages later, asking: “What kind of mind must he have to stick it? Where is the stir and prod? Where is the joy of doing? How noble does such a task make him?” (*EW* 180). The question of “what kind of mind” is required by this repetitive work is one to which Hilton frequently returns in his critiques of rationalization.

For Hilton, part of the problem with repetitive work is that it requires no intellectual skills on the part of the worker: “The skill required from the individual operative is little more than patience, precision, and subordination.” Such work is “heart-breaking, mindless, speedy, sapping the human traits, uneventfully precise” (*EW* 83). By suggesting that factory work encourages “subordination,” Hilton evokes a tradition of working-class resistance to industrialization that began in the early nineteenth century. According to E. P. Thompson, working-class artisans feared that the replacement of skilled trades by rationalized work was an attempt to turn men into “tools,” “implements,” or “machines” that would “work according to the pleasure” of the bourgeoisie (832). But while Hilton may be referencing this tradition of working-class anti-industrialism, he modifies it by arguing that it is specifically the mindlessness of rationalized work that robs it of its “human traits” and turns men into machines (*EW* 83). This focus on industrialism’s mental effects suggests that skill, intelligence, and the use of the mind are traits that all humans – including working-class people – naturally possess and want to express in their work. When work no longer allows for the use of the mind, the humanity of the worker is lost, making them as unthinking as a machine:

Often work becomes nothing more than ‘goose-stepping to the machine’, a sort of human robot roboting with the mechanical robot, becoming a job a second, or a job-a-minute worker, – hour after hour, day after day, week after week, year after year doing the same mindless performance. (*EW* 83)

Hilton considers rationalized factory work inhuman not only because it is repetitive and unending in a way that is only possible for machines, but also because it eliminates the

need for the skill and mental involvement that are features of work done primarily by human beings. Hilton does not object to mechanization simply out of an inherent dislike for technology, but because it dehumanizes workers by creating “mindless” work.

Due to its monotony and lack of mental stimulation, rationalized labor has observable effects on the mental and cultural capacities of the workers. Hilton argues that anyone, regardless of background, would be negatively affected by the working conditions commonly found in rationalized factories. Referring to an acquaintance who was dismayed at the “apathy” of rationalized workers, Hilton argues:

Both he, the Lord Mayor, the Master of the Hounds, and Jack Hilton, literary aspirant, would be politically, religiously, civically and culturally unconscious if steeped regularly for eight hours a day in modern Leicester factory. We should not read Solomon, Shakespeare, Goethe, or Schopenhauer. We should not cross our legs and hem, we should not care a hoot about Simon de Montfort or militant pacifism. We should be off to the working men’s clubs to drink our pints and mix with our kind. (*EW* 84)

Hilton argues that any person forced to work in a “modern” factory would become uninterested in culture or politics. The list of things these factory workers are “unconscious” of is varied enough to include not only such literary figures as Shakespeare and Goethe, but also religious texts like the book of Solomon and political issues such as “militant pacifism.” By including such varied activities, Hilton demonstrates the magnitude of the loss that working people experience when their cultural experiences are limited to drinking or participating in other social activities.

It is important that Hilton acknowledges drinking as a popular leisure activity. Many authors who were concerned about working-class culture disapproved of working-class drinking habits, and attempts to reform or “elevate” working-class culture were often undertaken with the explicit aim of reducing alcohol consumption. Wright argued that “drunkenness” was “directly resultant” from the “absence of culture among the masses of people” and believed that providing more wholesome entertainment options would encourage the working class toward sobriety (38). Unlike Wright and other concerned reformers, Hilton does not blame working-class drinking habits on the workers’ “absence of culture.” Instead, Hilton argues that working-class cultural activities and drinking habits are both results of factory rationalization.¹

Hilton argues that people from all class backgrounds would be similarly affected by modern factory conditions, and he presents as examples people from a variety of economic and social positions, ranging from the “Lord Mayor” to Hilton himself. By including upper-class people in this statement, he suggests cultural preferences are not inherent qualities fixed from birth, but are dependent on material conditions and can change with one’s environment. By including himself on this list, he prevents his own familiarity with literary culture from serving as evidence against his argument. Because

¹ Engels makes a similar argument in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. He argues that poor working conditions force workers to seek forms of entertainment that will “make the prospect of the next day endurable” (176). As such, he considers working-class “intemperance” not as a choice, but as the “inevitable effect” of environmental “conditions” (177). Unlike Engels, Hilton does not consider drinking to be inherently negative, and even praises the positive mental and spiritual freedom afforded by drunkenness (“What Life Means to Me (IV)” 138-40). For Hilton, working-class drinking is only negative when it completely replaces other cultural activities.

Hilton is both working class and a “literary aspirant,” he could be considered an example of how working-class people can and should engage with literature and other forms of ‘high-brow’ culture. Using Hilton’s literary achievements as evidence, critics of the working class could argue that working-class people who do not participate in literary culture have simply chosen not to do so. By including himself on the list, Hilton suggests that his interest in literature was only possible because he did not work in a rationalized factory.

While Hilton and all those who have been able to avoid factory work may enjoy “Solomon, Shakespeare, Goethe, or Schopenhauer” and debate the merits of “militant pacifism” (*EW* 84), rationalized workers spend their leisure hours engaged in other activities:

We seek some recreation compatible with our neurosis, and this isn’t euphemism. We kill out minutes by shoving coppers in a pin-table slot, and pulling the nob, and watching the silver balls twirl into numbered holes. We support everything that is commercially designed to cater for the taste of the roboticised mass-man. Sorely we must recognize that all men are conditioned beings. Man is a day-dreaming poet if he has a sensitive soul, nothing to do, and his income is assured. He is an eater of pickled herrings if he works in a Widnes chemical factory. He is an habitué of the American talkie cinemas, or the dogs, of the Granby Hall fistic promotions, if he is a robot. Culture (citizenship, educational pursuits and the arts are part of culture) requires a modicum of congenial environment, and these days the light industrial jobs necessarily prevent this. Fancy expecting a man, or woman, who have done repetitive jobs, to get a kick from poetry or chamber music. They are too tired in minds and bodies to respond. The lute would lull them to sleep. They need the drums and the cymbals and the sax and the hot rhythmical music of jazz to make them shift their feet. Bach’s not a bit of good to them. Wagner’s orchestration cannot do to them what an easy, repetitive chorus, sung nasally by an American dancing Jane or sob sister, can do. They do not want to wrestle with philosophy; Schopenhauer is all ‘phoney’. They do not want mental wrestling, they want the real physical ‘woiks’. They want to see HE men

exhibiting the health, vigour, and primitive courage that they have lost in the process of being mechanically sweated. Beautiful Lily of Culture! The difficult idiom of Gerald Manley Hopkins! The intellectualism of the academicians! Ah, hell, such things must be pointless and headaching to them; and racehorse tips, competition guides, coupons, sports-chatter, beer, Marriene Dresliene hats, permanent waves, gum-chewing, lip-sticking, adulating male film stars, Lambeth walking, Sunday excursions, the insipid inanities of wise-cracking, and drift, must be blue heavens. When persons are made puppets, they can only have puppet tastes. (*EW* 85-6)

Hilton emphasizes that mechanized work corrupts both the bodies and minds of workers.

It replaces “health” and “vitality” with “neurosis,” making people bodily and mentally unwell and therefore unable to participate in healthy cultural and leisure activities. Quiet music and subtle art are lost on workers who are “too tired in minds and bodies to respond” to them. This description of the mental and physical degradation of workers also serves as a condemnation of factory conditions. If culture “requires a modicum of congenial environment,” then the preferred leisure activities of workers suggest that the environment in most factories is lacking even a “modicum” of congeniality.

For Hilton, the danger of rationalized work is not simply that it makes people physically tired; many non-mechanized jobs are also physically exhausting. Mechanical “roboticized” work is unique in that it combines physical exhaustion with repetitiveness and inhumanity, conditioning workers to enjoy standardized culture that is “commercially designed to cater for the taste of the roboticised mass-man.” Often, this “commercially designed” culture had direct parallels to the physical processes of factory work. Hilton argued that a person was more likely to consume artificial or preserved foods like “pickled herring” if he spent his day making artificial products in a “chemical factory,”

while a “robot” man who worked on a machine would attend the technologically advanced “talkie cinemas.” Similarly, those who work in repetitive jobs prefer their music to have an “easy, repetitive chorus,” while people who have been reduced to mindlessness do not want to engage in the “mental wrestling” of philosophy (85). Hilton feared that the dehumanizing effects of rationalized workplaces would determine the cultural and mental life of the working class: “When people are made puppets, they can only have puppet tastes” (86).

Hilton’s description of the similarities between mass-produced leisure and mechanized labor bears a striking resemblance to the description of the “culture industry” in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno and Horkheimer use the term “culture industry” to describe the newly-emerging forms of mass media. They argue that these types of media extend the “logic of work” into non-work hours. Because the repetitive, mechanized, mass-produced nature of culture-industry products mirrors the system of industrial production, the leisure provided by the culture industry is merely an extension of the “logic of work” into the cultural realm. Due to the similarities between the experience of industrial labor and the culture industry, workers attempting to “escape from the mechanized work process” through entertainment are met instead with “afterimages of the work process itself.” The culture industry’s monopoly on cultural production gives workers nearly no means of avoiding this type of entertainment (137). *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* was published only a few years after *English Ways*. Despite the stylistic and generic differences between the two texts, their near-

contemporaneity and similar subject matter speak to the widespread concern regarding changes in cultural production during the early twentieth century.

Hilton's description of the "puppet tastes" of the working class seems to anticipate Adorno and Horkheimer's argument that the logic of late capitalism cannot be contained to the workplace (*EW* 86). But for Hilton, the tragedy of rationalized work lies not only in what it introduces, but also in what it takes away. Hilton saw mass-produced entertainment replacing an already-existing working class culture:

We have changed from having babies to having baby cars. We have changed from human hearts to engine hearts, from song to listening in, from personal art in music and drama to dependence on a few stars, from the feel of life to the feel of commodities, and from individual craftsmanship to factory domination. (*EW* 179)

Hilton critiques "factory domination" because it prevents people from actively creating their own culture. Modern factory work takes away the working people's cultural agency, transforming them from performer to audience, from active participant to passive spectator. Yet this criticism suggests that the working class had, and to some extent still has, forms of popular culture that are distinguishable from the mass-produced culture that Hilton condemns as mere "puppet tastes" (*EW* 86). Rationalized work, in sapping people of their humanity and the exercise of their minds, keeps them from participating in their own culture, a culture that Hilton believes is genuinely valuable. In this sense, Hilton's criticism of common leisure activities is not a criticism of working-class culture as such, but of the influence of rationalization on that culture. Hilton does not believe that

working-class people have nothing valuable to add to culture; that criticism is reserved for the assembly-line.

Agriculture and Labor in Rural Settings

Hilton finds nothing of cultural value in mechanized factory work, but is there another kind of labor that he believes is more conducive to fostering a genuine working-class culture? Given that most rationalized factories were located in urban spaces, rural agricultural labor seems to be a natural alternative. Indeed, there is a long tradition of contrasting idealized versions of rural life with the industrialism of urban spaces. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams argues that late-Victorian authors often constructed rural life as an “affirmation of vitality” that was in “conscious contrast with the mechanical order, the artificial routines” of urban spaces (Williams 252). This was true of writers from all political backgrounds, including many popular socialist writers with whom Hilton may have been familiar. In *Merrie England* (1894), Robert Blatchford asks if any “practical man” would choose to “convert a healthy and beautiful country like Surrey into an unhealthy and hideous country like Wigan or Cradley” for the sake of cheaper mechanically produced luxuries (27). This type of rhetoric continued well into the twentieth century; D. H. Lawrence famously argued that the “real tragedy of England” was that the “country is so lovely: the man-made England is so vile” (291). The juxtaposition of country and city was a cultural commonplace that Hilton could have easily drawn upon to support his critique of industry.

Hilton seems like a natural inheritor of this tradition, as he often “drew upon images of pre-Industrial England as part of his criticism of factory rationalisation” (Croft 35). He calls himself a “return-to-nature-and-simplicity man” and stresses his enjoyment of natural landscapes (*EW* 187), often preferring the “healthy rusticity of rural England” to the “artificiality of urban existence” (Charlton 146). Hilton’s appreciation for rural areas is evident in his frequent lyrical descriptions of country landscapes and natural places. When he and Mary visit the sea, he pauses to admire the beauty of what seems to him like the last unsettled wild space. Reflecting on the difference between the emptiness of the sea and the business of the towns he had just left behind, he remarks: “You know the rationalized world of capitalism never gets you that way. Towns and neighbours, flea-bitten with an economy based on competition instead of co-operation, never please” (*EW* 197).

Hilton’s tendency to contrast the rural with the urban is not confined to landscapes and natural spaces, but is also evident in his descriptions of rural work. During their brief stay near Cirencester, he and Mary camped near a farm and watched the workers harvesting the crops:

I thought of the numbers I had seen harvesting since we set off in the morning; I thought how conscientiously all of them had been toiling. It is wrong to say toiling, working is better. They liked it. Given a good day, with a sun that is not too hot, men put to the task of gathering what they have sown are happy men. They never think for a moment ‘These are not my crops’. They like the harvest. It’s a fulfilment of their labour. Whilst we were resting the labourers were working. Eight p.m. came and still they worked. At 9 p.m. they knocked off, tired but happy, and glad they had overtime money to come. (*EW* 284-5)

Hilton's description of "happy men" who "like the harvest" and end their work day "tired but happy" stands in direct contrast to his descriptions of bored, miserable factory workers. Unlike the urban workers who are unhappy "slaves," rural laborers seem content to work long days and even into the night "gathering what they have sown." This depiction of rural labor fits well into the tradition of William Morris, Robert Blatchford, and others who romanticize rural life as a way of critiquing industrial urban spaces.

Although Hilton draws on this tradition of praising rural landscapes and even mill work in agricultural settings, in other passages he refuses to completely romanticize rural life, acknowledging the physical hardships faced by rural workers:

The farm labourer is a docile thing that is untutored, and rarely befriended, employed by the whim of the wealthy, driven by the solvent farmer as hard as his slow-thinking mind and dreary body can be... The farm-hand has been underfed, overworked, badly housed and made stupid from being ordered about during the whole modern period in which England has been only slightly interested in agriculture. ... Life for the Buckinghamshire landworker is land drudgery of the kind that keeps him poor, and tired. I might delight in the village green, and notice the sunbeams chasing the shadows, but he has got his back bent to his labours. (EW 111-2)

This description of farm labor stands in stark contrast to the depiction of the harvesters contentedly bringing in their crops. In this passage, Hilton stresses the poor living and working conditions faced by many farm workers. Rural laborers, much like their urban counterparts, are "made stupid" by "being ordered about" during their working hours. While urban workers are "ordered about" by the machines they work on, it seems that

rural laborers working for human bosses are also made “stupid” and “docile” by their work.

One reason why farm labor does not offer a complete solution to the problem of rationalized labor is that the workers are unable to appreciate the natural world in which they work. While Hilton and his wife can “delight in the village green” or “notice the sunbeams chasing the shadows,” the agricultural worker must have his “back bent to his labours” (*EW* 112). The necessity of physically exhausting work prevents the rural working class from feeling the aesthetic appreciation that Hilton is able to experience. Hilton valued the natural world, and believed that contemplating nature was a fundamental human experience. In “What Life Means to Me (IV)” he describes the value of solitary contemplation of nature: “The changings of the skies, the glory in the sun, and the maddening moon can take possession of you. And you become real when you are lost to what does not matter, and possessed by what does matter” (142). To fully experience this “possession,” one must be separated from the world of work, “attuned, de-moneyised, de-jobised” (141). The rural worker with his “back bent to his labours” is unable to separate himself from his work, and therefore unable to experience the aesthetic appreciation of nature that Hilton valued and that might have separated rural labor from its urban equivalent (*EW* 112).

Artisans and Skilled Trades

Hilton often depicts rural labor as exhausting drudgery that keeps workers from communing with nature. As such, it does not seem to provide an appealing alternative to

rationalized labor. But rural labor was not the only possible alternative to factory work available at the time; skilled trades still flourished despite the increasing standardization of production. Hilton often contrasts the monotony of rationalized work with the relative variety provided by the “hard, independent, unskilled, outdoor (and largely male) piece-work” that still characterized labor in most skilled trades (Croft 38). Compared to monotonous, mindless factory work, piece-work was much more varied, and this variation prevented workers from being “roboticised”:

There is something that belongs to man in the use of hand tools. You feel them. They are part of you. They depend on you and you are master of them. With the machine the reverse is the case. You can love an occupation that allows for your individuality, for your humour. Plastering is essentially human, and it makes its tradesmen human. Our material comes from mother earth, and we use it with skill and muscle. There is scope for elbow and mind. Relative to men in other occupations we may appear primitive. That is our good fortune. The modern machineman is in a state of neurotic tension; we get some of the pulse of individual, human elation. We get the satisfaction that we have really done something; something that a machine hasn't done; something that has called for greater patience, ingenuity, and skill than a four-minute job. Years of tool control, and quickness of eye and limb, and adaptability go into every day's work we do. We feel something of the vitality of functioning. (“Plasterer's Life” 22)

Unlike rationalized work that “sap[s] the human traits” from its workers (*EW* 83), working with hand tools preserves the variation and “adaptability” that is essential to humanity (“Plasterer's Life” 22). And while the “modern machineman” is made “neurotic” by the unending, repetitive nature of his work, the craftsman feels a healthy “human elation,” and can even “love” his profession.

Unlike rationalized factory work that requires mindless physical exertion, Hilton stresses that working with hand tools requires both “skill and muscle,” “elbow and mind” (“Plasterer’s Life” 22). Hilton’s emphasis on the simultaneous physical and mental aspects of the work stands in stark contrast to descriptions of physical labor by earlier socialist writers. For example, while Blatchford believed that artistic work could be gratifying, he considered physical labor to be a “dull mechanical task, to be done for bread, but never to be made to yield pleasure, or praise, or profit” (42). In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891), Oscar Wilde argues that while the creation of beautiful things is enjoyable, most unskilled manual labor is “absolutely degrading” and precludes “mental, moral, or physical dignity” (31). Hilton demonstrates that physical labor can yield just as much pleasure as any art, so long as it “allows for your individuality, for your humour” (“Plasterer’s Life” 22).

Hilton frequently praised work that, although physically strenuous, allowed the worker to use his mind. By stressing the intellectual component of skilled trades, Hilton distances himself from his contemporaries, some of whom depicted trades as requiring natural abilities rather than learned skills. In her autobiography, *World Without End*, Helen Thomas describes watching the work of “slow experienced labourers, whose knowledge had come to them as the acorns come to the oaks, whose skill had come as the swallow’s skill, who are satisfied in their hard life as are the oaks and swallows in theirs” (Thomas 107). By comparing laborers to animals and plants, Thomas “exclude[s] human learning” and casts the laborers as unintelligent, unthinking, and even inhuman (Williams

259). While Thomas treats the skills of laborers as natural, unlearned abilities that do not require the intellect, Hilton takes pride in the “tool control” that takes “years” to learn and that must be consciously applied to every job (“Plasterer’s Life” 22). Hilton praises manual labor, while being careful not to reduce manual workers to animals or reject their intelligence, learning, and creativity.

Hilton’s appreciation of skilled trades extended to some industries that were partially mechanized. While he opposed assembly-line factories and the short, repetitive jobs they entailed, outside of that context he was not strictly opposed to the use of machines. This is evident in his descriptions of forge workers at a railway company in Swindon:

The greatest enjoyment I received from the visit was watching a forge-man handle his job of work. Great! Sculptors can chisel all the figures of the winners of Olympic laurels that there ever were in Greece, but they will not have the grace and vitality of a forge-man using a huge mechanical hammer. There’s some living, physical poetry in the countenance of the man. He has a tough but sensitive face, and eye like a hawk, splendid hands – not gentleman’s hands, but hands that are alive with the sense of tool-using. He has good feet and good balance. His cardinal qualities are his power for immediate total concentration and his quickness of physical response to the requirements of that concentration. He looks a bit of a pirate in his white cap, but lawful in his leather apron. He has a big machine which is a combination of anvil and mechanical-heavy-hammer. It’s his baby, his pen, his shovel, his literature, his politics, it’s his god. He can strike a ten-ton blow and crack a foot of steel; he can touch an egg without breaking the shell. He can do everything the village blacksmith can do but he does it on a giant scale. (*EW* 297)

In this passage, Hilton portrays the forge-man as the most perfect example of humanity, greater even than the “winners of Olympic laurels” that serve as the subjects of sculpture.

The forge-man's physique is so perfect that he becomes an embodiment of aesthetic beauty, a sort of "physical poetry," that seems to overshadow all other forms of art. The work of forging itself is elevated to encompass the entire possible cultural output of mankind, becoming the "pen" and "shovel," the "literature" and "politics" of the worker.

Hilton's description of the forge-man in the above passage may seem extreme, but praise for the mental and physical benefits of craftsmanship was relatively common in the period. In painting a romanticized version of work, Hilton may have been drawing on an already available tradition of popular socialist writing. Blatchford distinguishes between "work" and "toil," emphasizing the difference between the "work of the wood carver and the toil of the wood chopper" (42). He argues that more "artistic" forms of work, like wood carving or writing, are "pleasant," "elevating," and "productive of contentment" (195). Though Blatchford would probably not have considered forge work "artistic," echoes of his description of work as "elevating" can be seen in Hilton's depiction of the forge-man. The belief that some work was so ennobling that it could be considered leisure was a common trope in socialist tracts and pamphlets. In *Useful Work Versus Useless Toil* (1893), William Morris separates work into two kinds: "useful work," which is "not far removed from a blessing, a lightening of life" and "useless toil," which is "a mere curse, a burden to life" (3). Hilton was well-read in socialist literature, and was probably well-versed in this tradition. He certainly appears to reference this genre of writing and to use it for his own purposes of critiquing rationalization and making a space for working-class intelligence and creativity. His descriptions of rationalized work and

agricultural labor seem to fit neatly into Morris's category of "useless toil," while his praise of the forge-man seems to echo Morris's descriptions of "useful work" that is a "blessing." Yet, while Hilton sometimes follows in the tradition of Blatchford and Morris by creating a neat dichotomy between ennobling skilled labor and other, more degrading forms of work, at other times he complicates his own rosy portrayal of work in skilled trades.

Hilton was careful to never completely romanticize the experience of working in a skilled trade. Although he frequently "lionized work," he was also conscious of the "time-consuming, exhausting, unavoidable misery that work involves for most people" (Croft 39). While in the passages above he glorified skilled labor, in other places he painted a more balanced picture of the physical and mental toll of work. In the same railroad factory where he watched the forge-men, he also admired the work of the moulders: "It was marvelous, and revealing, and had the touch of the elemental. Men that can do such work are men." He describes moulding in much the same terms as he does other skilled labor, noting that moulders are "battling with *mind*, muscle, and natural aptitude to win good castings and draw wages." But unlike his descriptions of the forge-men, in this passage Hilton also admits the negative effects of moulding: "It is not surprising that they have no surplus initiative or assertiveness left for non-working hours. All of it has been absorbed by the day's work-battle. Work isn't romance, it's a punishing necessity" (EW 295). Later, Hilton admits that the physical labor of moulding "makes one tired and more sleepy than bookish." This statement is partially meant as an insult to

the “physically smug, mentally, politically, and aesthetically alert” middle-class socialists whose “bookish” unfamiliarity with physical labor allows them to consider work a “romance” rather than a “punishing necessity” (296).² But Hilton’s admission of the physical effects of moulding also echoes his criticism of both rationalized work and rural labor. Because this passage comes just a few pages before the description of the forgerman, it acts to temper the overly romanticized passage that follows. By emphasizing the physical toll of moulding and the effects it has on workers’ energy levels and ability to engage with culture, Hilton complicates his relationship with skilled trades, and suggests that they cannot provide an ideal solution to the problems of rationalization or of working-class culture.

The Problem of Work

Hilton certainly critiqued rationalized work, but he also emphasized the flaws in other kinds of work that might otherwise seem like ideal replacements for mechanized light industry. While Hilton believed that rationalized work produced the worst outcomes for working-class culture, he was aware of the detrimental effects of *all* kinds of “respectable wage slavery” on the minds of workers (Croft 36). In *Caliban Shrieks*, Hilton describes the men of his generation who have returned to work after the first World War, noting the effects of labor on their bodies:

² Hilton is almost certainly referring to Orwell here, and makes specific reference to a passage in *The Road to Wigan Pier* in which Orwell complains of the way working-class men smell. For more on the relationship between Hilton and Orwell, see Clarke and Fleay.

What tailor could meet their slender purses and yet hide the fact that they are toilers? Where is their poise, straightness, carriage, where is their elasticity of heel; what collar could rest unwrinkled when their bony collar bones stick out so generously? How can one's head sit graciously, when the nape of the vertebrae aches with jaded exhaustion? Such is the price of eating the b----- job. (*Caliban Shrieks* 57)

This is a vivid description of the long-term effects that a life of physical labor has on the body. Hilton frequently returns to images of men who have been physically shaped by their work. In "The Plasterer's Life," Hilton explains the thinness and quickness of the "doffers" at the cotton mill by arguing that the "work made of us what it required" (18). This transformation of workers by their work extends into the cultural realm as well. The physical effects of their work make the men unable to appreciate tailored suits, products created by a skilled craftsman. Just like the items created by plasterers, moulders, and forge-men, a tailored suit is a product of working-class creativity and craftsmanship. Yet the act of laboring makes working men unable to fully appreciate this product of working-class culture.

After establishing that work prevents workers from fully appreciating the products of their own creativity, Hilton transitions to the effects of work on other aspects of culture:

What mental recreation is acceptable to the fatigued body? None, only the artificial manufactured kind. Horseology, cardology, beerology, and sexology.

Man is the creature of conditions – environment; if the brute is over-worked he generally cannot think. That must be done for him by Edgar Wallace, Winalot, and the Bow St. Reporter. Of course this is for the good. What is nicer than hewing wood and drawing water to the thoughts of "What's going to win the

Two-Thirty?” or “Yes, he has to hang by the neck until dead.” Possible fortune on one hand and glorious better-than-he on the other. (*Caliban Shrieks* 58)

Hilton argues that man is a “creature of conditions” whose environment has the power to transform his body and mind. Just as work makes men’s bodies unfit for tailored suits, it makes their minds unfit for anything but “artificial manufactured” culture. Hilton does not blame the workers for choosing this kind of entertainment, but considers their preference for horse races and police reports to be the natural result of work that makes men into unthinking “brute[s].” For Hilton, labor’s ability to deform the minds of workers is as damning as its ability to physically deform the body, and indeed the two outcomes are connected. Any work that leads to a “fatigued body” routinely enough to cause permanent physical changes also has negative effects on working-class culture.

Though Hilton criticizes the negative physical and mental effects of all work, he does not view work, or even hard physical labor, as something that should be eliminated completely. While Andy Croft is correct to suggest that Hilton never “lionized” work for its own sake, he does praise its productivity, the room it can lend to creativity, and the place it makes for the production of genuine working-class popular art (39). As his descriptions of skilled trades and even agricultural work demonstrate, Hilton considered some types of work to be an already-existing working-class art-form. Moreover, Hilton acknowledges that even the most physically and mentally degrading work is responsible for the creation of “all that is or will be” (*Caliban Shrieks* 62). Every product, whether produced in a rationalized factory or by a skilled craftsman, is the result of the “creative

genius” of the working class (78). Although Hilton supports a reduction of work and a change in working conditions, he also wants the “earth to be plowed, and the corn to grow, and things to be built,” and believes those goals are “worth struggling for” (“Plasterer’s Life” 49). Hilton does criticize work, but he seems unwilling to argue for its complete cessation.

Possible Solutions to the Problem of Work

Given Hilton’s ambivalent attitudes towards rationalization, agricultural work, skilled trades, and indeed towards labor in general, it seems unreasonable to expect a simple solution to the negative effects of these processes on working-class culture. Hilton himself admits that he is unable to resolve these contradictions: “Personally, I have not much to offer as a way out” (“Plasterer’s Life” 46). However, Hilton does gesture toward some possible solutions. In *English Ways*, he attempts to find a compromise between modernity and pre-industrialism, rationalization and skilled physical work, productivity and leisure: “The alternative is the reassertion of our individuality. We must not be massified. The price of individuality will mean that we must live frugally, have an animal slowness, feel the pulse of living things, and refuse to step on the gas.” Hilton suggests that living “frugally” would lessen the demand for products and therefore cause a decrease in the need for work. While he believed that “society has too much of its bias weighted on the side of working, of making things,” that “bias” could be changed if people would “live frugally” and “refuse to step on the gas” (*EW* 180). By reprioritizing

society, the demand for work could be reduced and the amount of leisure available to workers could be increased.

Another benefit of “living frugally” is that it would allow for a reduction in mechanization and a partial return to older ways of living:

I think happiness can only come by undoing what has been done, by steering a course that is between the noble savage way and the modern way. Some attempt must be made to relate nature, individuals, and society. They should be a trinity giving sublimity to life, but at present they are opposing forces, devastatingly wasteful and unsatisfying. (*EW* 181)

While Hilton is aware that the course of history cannot be completely reversed, he nevertheless believes that a compromise can be made between industrialism and the individualism and connection to nature that he thought characterized pre-industrial society. He imagines a society in which there is a balance between the greater material wealth created by industrialism and the culture, individuality, and humanity that he believed were being threatened by increasingly mechanized workplaces.

While he does promote an end to rationalization, a reduction of working hours, and increased leisure time, he does not believe that these reforms are sufficient to allow for the full realization of working-class artistic potential. He also advocated for larger structural changes to society as a whole:

The lily-painted descriptions of nature by an artist in the throes of hypnotic rapture is but the expression of the dualism of being well fed and ideally imaginative. The Grecians with their culture belonged to the well fed minority, while their slave brethren were more or less inexpressive. So it is that we paint pictures according to our stage of evolution. Well-fedness is the objective

stimulus for the nice abstract words or canvas painting. A hungry man has a hungry outlook, and little or no interest in the noctambulist woolgatherings of the nature devotee, who raves away... (*Caliban Shrieks* 36)

While it is clear that Hilton is quite skeptical of the value of the artist's "noctambulist woolgatherings," his avowed appreciation for the natural world and his own tendency toward "lily-painted descriptions of nature" make it difficult to dismiss this passage as merely an ironic critique of upper-class aestheticism. Given his appreciation for the arts, his assertion that a person's ability to "paint pictures" or create "abstract words" is based on their level of "well-fedness" is a genuine critique of poverty's effects on working-class culture. It also demonstrates once again that cultural outcomes are dependent upon material conditions, and suggests that if culture is to be made available to more than a "well-fed minority," then "well-fedness" must be extended to all.

By demonstrating that the ability to participate in culture is dependent upon material conditions like "well-fedness," Hilton argues that cultural questions are ultimately connected to larger social and political concerns (*Caliban Shrieks* 36). If the quality of working-class culture is partially dependent on "conditions of labour and living," then changing that culture requires a change in political and economic conditions ("Plasterer's Life" 43). Hilton explains that he, like many other working people, became active in politics in order to change the material structures that prevent the working-class from taking part in culture:

We would much prefer to read poetry and appreciate the beauty of culture's charms, or sit in the fields and see the glory of the setting sun. I personally do

these things many times, and then just as I'm forgetting the problems of reality, I've to turn to them and face them. Without economic security is no escape to aesthetics. It was all right for a man like Ruskin to believe that art was the portrayal of the beautiful. If art is to be confined to such limits, then it will be art that is divorced from most of reality. It will only mirror the nice. I cannot always be entranced by the lovely, when I know that there is so much that is ugly. When I put the true mirror up to the environs of my class, the picture is horrible; if it is not artistic or idealistic, it is real and actual. There is no beauty about a slum or a tenement. Men with the work-look on their faces and the work fatigue on their bodies are not models for a beautiful art. Perhaps that is why most men of literature, of sculpture, and of painting, have chosen things that have been untainted with work as subject models. Men, women and children were intended to be lovely beings. They could be lovely if they had the chance. ("Plasterer's Life" 43-44)

Hilton argues that working-class people want to contemplate the beautiful, but are distracted from aesthetics by political and economic realities. It is impossible for them to "escape to aesthetics" when they are constantly being faced with the "reality" of their oppression. Moreover, the "reality" that they must face is in itself an unfit subject for "artistic or idealistic" art. Hilton certainly condemns the insularity of 'high art' that neglects working class subjects, but he simultaneously acknowledges the grim reality of poverty and its effects on the body. While he defends art that unromantically portrays "real and actual" working class people, he admits that the picture thus created is often "ugly." For Hilton, poverty is not only "horrible" because it causes physical privations and misery, but also because it prevents working-class people from appreciating, creating, or being portrayed in beautiful art.

Yet, Hilton acknowledges that this state of affairs is not inevitable: working-class people "could be lovely if given the chance." And while he considers working conditions

to be part of the problem, it is specifically the “old philosophies and old governments” that will not “give them the chance” (“Plasterer’s Life” 44). The “old philosophies” to which Hilton refers are almost certainly economic philosophies, which in denying “economic security” to the working class have prevented them from “escap[ing] to aesthetics” (43). Indeed, Hilton repeatedly argues that a person’s “habits and ideas of life” are influenced by their “economic environment” (*EW* 281) and that the “liberty to talk, write, [and] be idealistic” is founded on “economic liberty” (“Hibernation” 242). Because Hilton conceives of cultural issues in economic terms, he believes that solutions to cultural problems that do not include a change in material conditions are bound to be ineffective. Thus, if “old philosophies and old governments” prevent the working class from engaging in culture, they must be replaced: “We’ve done with them. We want a new and changed society” (“Plasterer’s Life” 44). The “new and changed society” that Hilton imagines is a socialist system in which the products of working class productivity are available to all: “Capitalism has been a step forward from feudalism, it has socialized production. We need the products to be socialized” (49). For Hilton, allowing the working class to fully participate in culture requires a new economic system that puts the means of production under the control of the workers. This is the only system that can guarantee that all people will have the economic security and freedom to actively engage with art and create their own popular culture.

Conclusion: Hilton's Continued Value

Hilton was deeply concerned about the relationship between work and leisure, material conditions, and cultural outcomes. Many of his lengthiest and most impassioned critiques were reserved for the kind of rationalized work that was beginning to characterize most light industries. He argued that the repetitive, monotonous nature of rationalized work made workers into subservient “robots” and conditioned them to passively accept the domination of machines. This conditioning carried over into the realm of culture, where the passive acceptance of cultural products was replacing the active creation of a genuinely popular art. However, Hilton's critique of industrialism did not preclude the criticism of other industries. He recognized that rural labor and skilled trades also took their toll on working class people's bodies and minds. At the base of these problems, Hilton pointed to the oppressive nature of capitalism, which he believed prevented the majority of people from achieving the economic security necessary for the appreciation of aesthetics.

Despite his relative obscurity, Hilton's work is a valuable resource for scholars interested in responses to industrialization. While the industrial revolution and successive advances in machine technology transformed British culture as a whole, the working-class was uniquely affected by the rapid changes in working conditions. Despite this, working-class voices are often absent from the narratives surrounding industrialism. The critiques of mechanization by middle- or upper-class commentators like Orwell or Morris often relied on romanticized notions of non-mechanized physical labor, erasing the

hardships of the people working in those trades. It is this romanticizing tendency that Hilton's voice helps to correct. Recovering and examining working-class authors like Hilton will give scholars access to a more diverse picture of how industrialism affected everyday life in inter-war Britain.

The inter-war years also saw many impassioned debates over working-class culture. Questions regarding the value of popular culture and the possible negative consequences of leisure activities on the working-class were highly contentious. Moral reformists and other cultural gatekeepers were invested in changing working-class habits to more closely align with bourgeois standards. At the same time, Marxist theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer were beginning to articulate the ideological nature of mass-produced media. Although these theorists were not invested in bourgeois values, their analyses sometimes reproduced the dichotomy between 'high' and 'low' art – a dichotomy that often associates working-class culture with art of low quality. But while Adorno and Horkheimer's work can occasionally tend toward elitism, Hilton's critique of popular entertainment is balanced by his genuine appreciation for working-class culture and his belief in the value of popular art forms. As such, Hilton's work represents a valuable intervention in the cultural debates of the period.

But Hilton is valuable as more than simply a window into the inter-war period; his work also provides useful theoretical and methodological insights. Because Hilton seeks material explanations for cultural changes, he takes a Marxist approach to the study of his specific historical moment, and thus seems to anticipate cultural studies methodology.

Indeed, Hilton shares many concerns with early cultural studies theorists. His tendency to define culture in broad, inclusive terms, his respect for working people as cultural agents, and his appreciation for working-class modes of cultural production seem to anticipate Raymond Williams's arguments in essays like "Culture is Ordinary." Hilton's distinction between authentic popular culture and mass-produced entertainment echoes not only his contemporaries like Adorno and Horkheimer, but also seems to anticipate distinctions made by Stuart Hall in *The Popular Arts* and Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*. By undertaking a nuanced materialist analysis of his own moment, Hilton provides a useful resource for scholars interested in analyzing inter-war culture from a materialist perspective. Moreover, because cultural studies has its foundation in a specifically working-class British Marxist tradition, returning to early British socialist authors like Hilton could provide an intellectual pre-history of the discipline, revealing methodologies and insights that may prove useful to modern cultural critics. As such, the rediscovery of Hilton and the recovery of similar authors could be the beginning of a larger project to uncover a history of radical working-class cultural critique.

The recovery of texts by Hilton and other working-class authors has the potential not only to illuminate cultural studies' intellectual past, but also to reorient our present concerns. Hilton's nuanced critique of the relationship between labor and leisure under capitalism serves as the foundation for his commitment to radical anti-capitalist politics. Because Hilton cites material conditions as the source of cultural products, he necessarily concludes that any radical change in cultural production will require similarly radical

changes in the material base of society. Hilton's analysis of cultural problems undergirds his support of radical politics demonstrating the radical potential of cultural studies and Marxist criticism as fields of inquiry. Hilton's work suggests that cultural criticism can provide a valuable critique of capitalism and reminds us that one of the virtues of analysis is its ability to inform and inspire political praxis. In *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams considers the revelation that the impoverishment of popular culture is the "consequence of a basically capitalist organization," the most compelling "reason for capitalism to be ended" (367). Hilton's work demonstrates that the power of cultural analysis to motivate political action is not only a contemporary phenomenon. Hilton's arguments and methodology illuminate the ways in which cultural concerns can form an integral component of radical politics. Hilton's analysis of the effects of labor on the intellectual and cultural climate provides a model for contemporary cultural studies scholars, urging us to return to the political roots of our discipline.

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“TO PICK OUT FOR ONESELF, TO CHOOSE”: EZRA POUND, CARL SCHMITT, AND THE POETICS OF SOVEREIGNTY

“I don’t believe any estimate of Mussolini will be valid unless it *starts* from his passion for construction. Treat him as *artifex* and all the details fall into place. Take him as anything save the artist and you will get muddled with contradictions” (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* 33). Ezra Pound’s description of Mussolini as an “artifex” – an artist or master craftsman – encapsulates one of the central tensions in his work: the apparent contradiction between his avant-garde poetics and his active engagement in fascist political projects during both the interwar years and World War II. Of course, this problem is not unique to Pound. Scholars of modernism have long debated the connection between modernist aesthetics and the authoritarian political leanings of many of its canonical authors. The question still stands, however: why were so many modernists attracted to fascist and other far-right political movements, and what implications does this tendency toward authoritarianism have for modernist aesthetics? Specifically, what is the connection between Ezra Pound’s poetic and political activities?

This essay seeks to address these questions by focusing on Pound’s inter-war nonfiction prose – specifically pieces considered to be either influential statements of modernist poetics or representative samples of his critical writing. I read these texts alongside the work of Carl Schmitt, focusing on his theory of sovereignty. After a brief summary of the theoretical debate surrounding the relationship between politics and

aesthetics, I outline Schmitt's definition of sovereignty and the relationship between a sovereign's power and his use of language. Using Schmitt as a theoretical framework, I then turn to Pound's early articulations of the role of the artist and the implications of that role on his creation of a paratactic poetic style. Pound continues to explore the role of the artist and the value of parataxis throughout his career, and I trace the connections between these two concerns, focusing specifically on his 1930s prose. Finally, I argue that Pound's articulation of aesthetic problems in terms of sovereignty transitions seamlessly into his political writing and eventual support of fascist dictators like Mussolini. By using Schmitt's work to explicate Pound's, I also hope to demonstrate the relevance of Schmitt's judicial theory to literary studies and provide a framework for further investigations of the political implications of modernist poetics.

Because of his central role in establishing modernist poetics and his well-known support for Italian fascism, Pound has been at the center of the debate over the connection between aesthetic and political modernism. Some early scholarship attempted to separate the two realms entirely. Describing the scholarly attempt to salvage Pound's poetics from the wreckage of his political commitments, David Barnes argues that

early polarized accounts of Pound tended to either marginalize his political engagement or explain it in over-simplified terms, in both cases keeping it away from his cultural/aesthetic activities. In the popular account of Pound, a split emerged between the early radical modernist Pound and his reactionary, Fascist successor. (Barnes 20)

Yet this explanation has proven largely unsatisfactory. As Matthew Feldman argues, the “self-serving conceit that modernism was somehow inured from ideological extremism” and the insistence on “conceive[ing] modernism in purely aesthetic terms” has failed to account for much of Pound’s output (Feldman ix).

More recently, many scholars have explored the connections between fascist politics and the modernist aesthetics of artists living throughout Europe.³ In Pound scholarship specifically, Barnes has argued that the “difficulty of separating political and esthetic questions within the Poundian universe” necessitates that those works representing Pound’s “propagandistic drive” must be understood “in relationship to the development of Pound’s larger poetic project” (Barnes 20). Many scholars have worked to explicate Pound’s economic and political theories, while others have explored the political and racial themes of the *Cantos*.⁴ While it is generally accepted that Pound’s political and poetic interests mutually influenced each other, the extent of that influence is still a matter of scholarly debate.

Aesthetics and Politics: Theoretical Background

Questions raised by Pound scholars regarding the relationship between aesthetics and politics mirror theoretical conversations taking place in modernist studies and other fields. Indeed, the larger theoretical debate on this topic not only demonstrates the

³ See Hewitt and Sherry. For an exploration of the appropriation of avant-garde aesthetics by fascist leaders, see Antliff.

⁴ For a thorough discussion of Pound’s Anglophone propaganda, see Feldman. For a discussion of the *Cantos*, see Casillo and Bacigalupo. For more general surveys of Pound’s fascism, see Redman and Barnes. For an analysis of the Pound’s economic theories, see Nicholls.

importance of these questions, but also provides useful contextual and theoretical tools with which we can approach Ezra Pound's work. As such, it is useful to explore various theoretical attempts to come to terms with this problem.

Theorists of the interplay between aesthetics and politics generally fall into two categories: those who argue for the essential difference between the two realms and those who argue that they are fundamentally connected. Falling into the first category is Julien Benda, a contemporary of Pound's. In *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1928), Benda argues that the "clerks" – a category including artists and all those "whose activity essentially is not the pursuit of practical aims" – have betrayed their fundamental purpose by becoming involved in "political passions," especially nationalism (43-4). For poets, this betrayal manifests itself in poetry that "entirely devotes itself to serving racial passion and national feeling" rather than "truly philosophical" subjects (69). This notion of treason or betrayal suggests not only that there exists a separation between pure intellectual pursuits and political activities, but also that artists only truly fulfill their vocation when they choose to align themselves with the former rather than the latter.

Benda's theory of betrayal seems to mirror Pound's increasing focus on political and economic writing beginning in the inter-war years and continuing throughout the war. In this sense, it could be argued that Pound enacts Benda's treason in miniature over the course of his lifetime.⁵ But while this notion of betrayal may provide a useful

⁵ Pound was familiar with Benda and *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. Interestingly, Pound argued that, in his case, the "great betrayal" would be for him to "be quiet" on matters of economics and to admit that it is "indecent for a man of letters to touch such a subject" (*Ezra Pound Speaking* 292). Thus, Pound uses Benda's concept of treason to argue exactly the opposite of what Benda intended.

framework for considering changes in poetic content, it fails to provide a clear articulation of how intellectual “treason” influences Pound’s aesthetics. Moreover, the very concept of treason presupposes that intellectual or aesthetic work is fundamentally nonpolitical in nature. According to Benda, an interrogation of the politics of aesthetics would be a contradiction in terms. Because Benda’s theory assumes the dichotomy between intellectual and political activities, it is unable to account for the “difficulty of separating political and aesthetic questions within the Poundian universe” (Barnes 20).

Like Benda, contemporary theorist Renato Poggioli views aesthetics and politics as oppositional. In *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1962), Poggioli argues that there are two distinct meanings of the term “avant-garde”: a sociopolitical avant-garde and a cultural-artistic avant-garde (11). While these two meanings of the word are often united, with aesthetically radical work being created by artists committed to revolutionary politics, they can also be separated so that a work’s aesthetic experimentalism need not be tied to overt political propagandizing (12). Poggioli’s formulation suggests that there can be a revolutionary aesthetic movement that not only has no intentional political affiliations, but whose aesthetic principles are completely politically innocent, void of any political implications. By allowing for this category of nonpolitical art, Poggioli suggests that aesthetics are fundamentally separable from politics.

While theorists like Benda and Poggioli have provided paradigms that establish a fundamental divide between aesthetics and politics, others have argued for an essential connection between the two realms. Jacques Rancière theorizes that specific stylistic

techniques can be “radical[ly] egalitarian” (*Dissensus* 156). He argues that literature that does not stylistically differentiate between “high and low subject matters,” “foreground and background,” and “men and things” (154) enacts a democratic politics by dismissing “any principle of hierarchy” (156). Rancière provides a description of potentially radical democratic poetics, but while some features of reactionary or fascist poetics could be inferred from his work, he does not provide a clear definition.

Walter Benjamin provides what is probably one of the most well-known descriptions of fascist aesthetics. A contemporary of Pound's, he attempted to explain the rise of fascism as it occurred. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Benjamin argues that fascism “attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses” by “giving these masses... a chance to express themselves” rather than materially changing their situation or increasing their liberty. This leads to the “introduction of aesthetics into political life” (241). Benjamin cites the Italian Futurists as one example of an artistic movement that participated in the fascist “efforts to render politics aesthetic.” Benjamin cites two primary features of Futurist aesthetics. The first is their praise for the aesthetic properties of war, which they considered to be an “aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (242). While Pound's stance on war was complicated and changed throughout his lifetime, his frank depictions of the aftermath of war in parts IV and V of “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” make it difficult to suggest that Pound viewed war as an “aesthetic pleasure” (*Personae* 187-8). Moreover, Pound often justified his support of fascism by claiming that allied countries instigated war by acting aggressively, forcing

both Germany and Italy to take what he considered to be defensive military action (*Ezra Pound Speaking* 21, 39, 81, 271, 395). Pound found neither aesthetic nor political value in war, and this discomfort can be considered a significant difference between Pound and the Italian Futurists.

The second trait that Benjamin ascribes to Futurism is the attempt to imitate in their art the “rapid sequence of the film strip” (251). It is true that montage, a practice often likened to cinematic techniques such as jump cuts and rapid perspective shifts, is a key feature of much modernist poetry, including Pound’s. Moreover, it may be possible to draw connections between the rapidity Benjamin ascribes to the Futurists and the brevity of poems like “In a Station of the Metro” (*Personae* 111). But while the Futurists actively attempt to imitate cinema and other technological advances, discussions of technology and of film are conspicuously absent from Pound’s poetics. Not only does he seem disinterested in imitating film, but also at times he seemed actively hostile to the Futurists’ interest in technology. Pound faulted Marinetti and the Futurists specifically for their “automobilism,” a term he used to criticize their positive view of technology (Lewis 1.143). As such, it seems unlikely that Pound himself considered mechanization to be a compelling model for poetic form. While Benjamin provides a piercing analysis of the Futurist preoccupation with both war and technological innovation, the specificity of his argument makes it inadequate to account for Pound’s aesthetics.

Carl Schmitt and the Definition of Sovereignty

While both Benjamin and Rancière provide useful examples of the political implications of aesthetic practices, neither seems adequate to address the particular aesthetic qualities of Pound's work. In order to more fully explore this problem, I suggest turning to an unlikely source: German judicial theorist Carl Schmitt (1888-1985). Schmitt is most well known as the author of *Political Theology* (1922), in which he defines sovereignty and describes the role of the sovereign. His theory of sovereignty was written in part as a defense of the office and powers of the German president, and would eventually serve as a justification for German fascism.⁶ Pound's close association with Italian rather than German fascism means that his aesthetic and political philosophies have rarely been considered in Schmittian terms. Despite their contemporaneity, there is no evidence that Pound was familiar with *Political Theology* or Schmitt's concept of sovereignty. Nevertheless, I believe Schmitt's work provides a useful lens through which to view Pound's aesthetic theories. Schmitt contributed to the emerging field of fascist political theory, so his work provides a window into fascist ideology as it was developing. Schmitt is particularly useful for literary scholarship because he draws explicit parallels between politics and language use. Due to his importance for the development of fascism and his engagement with aesthetics, his work provides useful vocabulary for discussing the relationship between politics and language.

⁶ See Tracy Strong's forward to *Political Theology*, especially xxix-xxxi, George Schwab's introduction to the text, especially xxxviii-xl and xlv-xlix, and Guy Oakes's introduction to *Political Romanticism*, especially ix-xiii.

Schmitt's theory of sovereignty is founded on the ability of a sovereign to make decisions in times of exception or crisis: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (*Political Theology* 5). Schmitt defines a state of exception as any circumstance for which there is no provision in the constitution, laws, or governmental institutions of a nation. It is the sovereign's duty to decide when a state of exception has occurred, to assume authority during the state of exception, and to decide when the state of exception has ended and normal legal operations can resume (7). The sovereign is characterized by his ability to come to a quick decision on matters without recourse to precedent. It is important for Schmitt that the sovereign decision be a "decision in the true sense of the word" (6). For a decision to be the "true" decision of a sovereign, the deciding entity must be a single individual rather than a group or collective. This is because a truly sovereign decision is always a "personal decision" (52). Schmitt valorizes the personal and individual nature of the sovereign decision and contrasts this with the impersonality of choices made collectively. If the power of decision is dispersed through a group, such as a legislative body or a voting populace, the "decisionistic and personalistic element in the concept of sovereignty [is] lost" (48). For Schmitt, only a personal sovereign can assume control during a moment of crisis, and he must act alone to make effective decisions about how best to handle that crisis.

Because he is defined by his individuality, Schmitt's sovereign does not confer with others. He does not engage in discussion, which would remove his individuality and personalism and would therefore delay his action. As such, a sovereign speaks only to

declare his decisions, never to engage in discussion with others. This hostile relationship between sovereignty and discussion has clear aesthetic implications and suggests an intimate connection between aesthetics and politics. Schmitt explicitly explores that connection in *Political Romanticism* (1912), in which he critiques the political implications of the Romantic worldview. His decision to critique Romanticism may appear contradictory, given the extent to which Romantic authors valued individualism and personal experience.⁷ Indeed, Schmitt largely ignores those facets of Romanticism that one might expect him to praise. Instead, he constructs a version of Romanticism in opposition to his own values and against which he can define and differentiate his own aesthetic and political beliefs. This strategy of defining himself in contrast to the Romantics is one he shares with many modernist authors, including Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, and Wyndham Lewis.⁸

Schmitt argues that Romantics consider the world as an “opportunity for his romantic productivity,” or for the production of aesthetic contemplation and its attendant emotional experiences (17). He suggests that, when faced with an opposition that would require choosing between alternatives, the Romantic refuses to acknowledge the opposition or choose a single course of action. Instead, he “suspends the oppositions” by treating it as merely a pleasing aesthetic contrast (88). Schmitt constructs aestheticism

⁷ Because of its association with individualism, some theorists and philosophers have argued that Romanticism was a precursor to fascism. Bertrand Russell, for example, argues that the “romantic revolt” in both politics and aesthetics “passes from Byron, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche to Mussolini and Hitler” (Russell 719). For an overview of the relationship between Schmitt and the Romantics, see Kuiken.

⁸ Irving Babbitt is also an important contributor to this tradition, and his demonization of Romanticism had wide-reaching influence. See *Rousseau and Romanticism*.

and aesthetic appreciation in opposition to the kind of decision-making that is necessary for a sovereign.

Because the Romantics are supposedly unable to make decisions, they relegate themselves to passivity. For Schmitt, the Romantic devotion to aesthetics causes them to be artistically “productive without becoming active” (*Political Romanticism* 159).

Schmitt argues that “political activity is not possible” for the Romantics and that they are therefore restricted to the realm of “criticism,” where they “discuss everything” (159) and thus give up “every active alteration of the real world” (162). As Guy Oakes argues, Schmitt objects to the Romantics for “transforming political debate into an endless conversation in which the pursuit of amusement and self-indulgence render genuine political decisions impossible” (xiii). The connection between discussion and inaction is repeated in *Political Theology*, in which Schmitt dismisses the bourgeoisie as a “discussing class,” a definition that he claims “contains the class characteristic of wanting to evade the decision” (59). For Schmitt, discussion, language, and the aesthetic realm preclude action and the ability to make decisions.

Schmitt suggests that liberal democracy means the shifting of “all political activity onto the plane of conversation” (*Political Theology* 59). He claims that this connection between democracy and conversation invalidates democracy as a viable political system. Just as the Romantic artist’s aestheticism allows him to transform the moment of decision into one of contemplation and aesthetic pleasure, parliament’s necessary reliance on discussion and “debate” allows its members to evade the crucial

moment of decision. This decision remains “suspended forever in everlasting discussion” (*Political Theology* 63). As such, parliamentary democracy and the discussion on which it is based result in indecision and inaction. In contrast to these inefficient institutions, a true Schmittian sovereign is characterized not by his speech, but by his actions.

Discussion is also a poor foundation for government because it can be used as a “method of circumventing responsibility” (*Political Theology* 63). In a democratic system, the responsibility for a decision is dispersed over the entire governing body, making it impossible to hold any individual personally accountable for the outcomes of the group’s decisions. Unlike the decisions of a parliament or other democratic body, the liability for the decisions of a sovereign can be attributed to a single person.⁹ A sovereign is necessarily personally responsible for his actions, and can thus be held to account for their outcomes. For Schmitt, a sovereign dictatorship is not only necessary in order to manage exceptional circumstances, but it also has the additional benefit of being more ethically sound than a parliamentary democracy.

Schmitt’s ideas about language, responsibility, and democracy have a clear connection to the actual political situation he was attempting to address. His defense of the sovereign, while theoretically applicable to any judicial circumstance, was written

⁹ Schmitt’s construction of democracy as antithetical to individual responsibility is similar to Hitler’s critique of democracy in *Mein Kampf*. Hitler contrasts the parliamentary system, characterized by the “absence of any responsibility” (79), to what he called a “truly Germanic democracy,” in which the people elect a single leader who makes unilateral decisions on matters of policy. In contrast to the parliamentary system, “Germanic democracy” reintroduces responsibility into government, because the leader “must answer with his fortune and his life for his choice[s]” (91). Also of interest is Mussolini’s assertion that “We are tired of a government in which there is no responsible person having a hind name, a front name and an address,” which Pound favorably quotes in *The ABC of Economics (Selected Prose* 261).

specifically as a defense of the power of the German president to suspend the constitution during a time of crisis. Though he wrote both *Political Romanticism* and *Political Theology* before Hitler's rise to power, Schmitt would later use the theories articulated in these texts to defend many of Hitler's actions.¹⁰ While the debates regarding Schmitt's personal relationship to the Nazi Party are outside the scope of this project, his support of National Socialism highlights the potential political significance of his ideas about language.

For Schmitt, the problem of sovereignty is inextricably bound up with the problem of language and therefore of aesthetics. He connects the linguistic foundations of democracy to what he considers its tendency toward inaction and the avoidance of decisions. He constructs speech in opposition to action and defines the sovereign as one who acts without needing to discuss his decisions. A sovereign, because he makes decisions without consulting others, can be held responsible for the outcomes of his actions. In contrast, a group of discussants can diffuse responsibility among its many members. Thus for Schmitt, language, which is the foundation for democracy, is intimately connected to both inaction and irresponsibility. In opposition to this democratic morass, the sovereign acts independently and takes responsibility for those actions.

¹⁰ For an overview of Schmitt's relationship to the Nazi party, see Guy Oakes's introduction to *Political Romanticism*, especially ix-xiii.

Ezra Pound, Artistic Independence, and Parataxis

While it is clear that Schmitt views politics in linguistic terms, the immediate relevance of this formulation to literary studies and to Pound's work may be less obvious. How can Schmitt's definition of sovereignty help us to better understand the political implications of Ezra Pound's aesthetics? Reading Pound's work alongside Schmitt's reveals two seemingly unrelated strands of Pound's early thought: his emphasis on the importance of individualism for artists and critics and his attempts to create and foster a paratactic poetic style.

The individuality and independence of both artists and critics was important to Pound throughout his career. He establishes this concern beginning in his earliest essays, but it is perhaps most evident in his contributions to *Blast*, a Vorticist magazine and literature review edited by Wyndham Lewis. Published in two issues in 1914-15, *Blast* featured poetry, art, short fiction, and nonfiction prose. While many authors contributed to and signed their names to *Blast*, Pound and Lewis were the primary forces behind the magazine, co-authoring the many manifestos and statements of aesthetics featured in both issues. In the first issue of *Blast*, the opening manifesto proudly claims that "*Blast* presents an art of individuals" (1.8).¹¹ To Pound and Lewis, the separation of the individual from the multitude was a necessary part of being an artist: "The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time" (1.7). The

¹¹ Because *Blast* does not feature continuous pagination, all citations from *Blast* will include both the issue and page number. For example, a quote from page 8 of issue 1 is notated (1.8). Bibliographic information for *Blast* is listed under Lewis.

individuality of the artist did not simply demand his or her removal from social groups; it was integral to the process of artistic creation.

The importance of individuality to an artist's ability to make aesthetic decisions is evident in Pound and Lewis's discussion of Kandinsky in the first issue of *Blast*:

The insistence on the value of one's feelings as the only aesthetic impulse, means logically that the artist is not only entitled to treat form and colour according to his inner dictates, but that it is his duty to do so...on account of this, although the artist is absolutely free to express himself as he will in art, he is not free in life. (1.125)

In this passage, the artist is required to make autonomous decisions if he is to perform his "duty" as an artist. In the passage cited by Pound and Lewis, Kandinsky likens the artist to a king, a literal sovereign whose solitary decisions have wide-reaching impact: "He is not only a king...in the sense that he has great power, but also in the sense that his duties are great" (Qtd. *Lewis* 1.125). While it is Kandinsky who makes the connection between the artist and monarch, it is significant that Pound and Lewis found that statement important enough to quote directly.¹² Kandinsky's poetics held significance for both Pound and Lewis, who describe Kandinsky's essay as a "most important contribution" to modern art and dedicate seven pages of their magazine to excerpts from his work (1.119).

¹² Though outside the scope of this project, Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art* is certainly of interest here. Kandinsky describes society as a triangle which moves toward progress tip first, led by a single man of genius. See Kandinsky 15-33. *On the Spiritual in Art* was not translated into English until 1946, but was available in German in early 1912. It is therefore possible that Pound could have been acquainted with Kandinsky's theories while writing nearly all of the prose cited in this essay. Regardless of Pound's familiarity with his work, Kandinsky provides yet another example of an avant-garde artist whose aesthetics have potentially fascist political implications.

In the portion of the magazine reserved for Pound's individual statement of aesthetics, he names Picasso and Kandinsky as "father and mother" of the Vorticist movement. This statement attests to Pound's personal regard for Kandinsky's art and aesthetic principles (1.154).

Just as it was for artists, the connection between language and sovereignty is also crucial for critics, whose role requires them to evaluate texts and communicate the results of their evaluations. While Pound's clearest articulations of his critical philosophy were written well after his Imagist period, they bear remarkable similarities to his earlier descriptions of artists. In the *ABC of Reading* (1934), Pound describes his ideal critic, who shares with Schmitt's sovereign both individualism and the ability to make decisions:

The critic who doesn't make a personal statement, *in re* measurements he himself has made, is merely an unreliable critic. He is not a measurer but a reporter of other men's results.

KRINO, to pick out for oneself, to choose. That's what the word means. (*ABC of Reading* 30, hereafter abbreviated *ABC* in parenthetical citations)

Like Schmitt, Pound stresses both the necessity of choice and the personal nature of that choice. A good critic, like a good sovereign, is defined not only by the ability to choose, but by the ability to choose "for oneself." The necessity for critics to make individual choices is a common theme throughout Pound's writing. In *How to Read* (1931), he argues that anyone who "wish[es] to be a good critic...will have to look for himself" (*How to Read* 25, hereafter abbreviated *HtR*). He repeats the sentiment three years later in

The ABC of Reading: “But instead of having me or anyone else tell you what is on the page, you should look for yourselves” (77). Rather than discussing with others, Pound’s ideal critic acts like a Schmittian sovereign by making individual decisions based on his or her own evaluation.

Much like Schmitt, Pound believes that sovereign individuality forces artists to take personal responsibility for their artistic and critical choices. In “Mr. Eliot’s Solid Merit” (1934), Pound praises T. S. Eliot’s critical work, contrasting it with the criticism of those “who have never signed a statement or answered a question in their 20 or 40 years of trading.” These critics are “parasites in the strict sense.” Taking no decisive action and “contributing nothing” of their own, they passively cling to the “mental activity” and artistic creation of others (*Polite Essays* 104). Because they will not sign their name to any definitive statement of values, they can neither be held accountable for their critical decisions nor made responsible for their lack of active critical engagement.

Another lifelong concern that Pound established early in his career was the belief that poetry should be characterized by linguistic efficiency and parataxis. Indeed, this focus on concision could be considered the defining feature of Pound’s Imagist and Vorticist periods. In the first issue of *Blast*, Pound made it clear that he believed wordiness was opposed to quality in poetry: “Elaboration, expression of second intensities, of dispersedness belong to the secondary sort of artist. Dispersed arts HAD a vortex...VORTICISM is art before it has spread itself into a state of flaccidity, of elaboration, of secondary applications” (*Blast* 1.154). In this passage, Pound criticizes

“secondary” artists whose work is characterized by “elaboration” and wordiness. By claiming that these arts “HAD a vortex,” Pound suggests that wordy “dispersed” art is a degenerate or decayed version of his own artistic style. Pound connects the wordiness of “elaboration” to “flaccidity,” a term that suggests impotence and thus passivity. This impotent, passive “flaccidity” is contrasted to the “bareness and hardness” (1.41) of the Vorticists, whose art is considered vital and active in comparison. In this passage and others like it, Pound repeatedly defines himself against wordiness and elaboration.

Pound’s emphasis on parataxis was not simply a means of defining his own artistic values and goals. He also believed that adherence to his principles would improve the work of others. As a critic and editor, he often pushed other artists to adopt his concise poetic language. In his famous role in editing T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Pound was responsible for the excision of lengthy sections of the poem. By urging Eliot to remove lengthy and frequent passages, Pound “threw the balance of *The Waste Land* from drama and narrative to symbol and image” (Litz 462), helping to craft a poem that “shares important qualities with *Maunderley* and the early *Cantos*” (461). I do not want to suggest that Pound forced himself on Eliot or made changes to the poem without Eliot’s permission. Simply, Pound’s recommendations to Eliot were in line with Pound’s own ideas about parataxis.¹³

Pound established both independence for artists and parataxis in poetry as fundamental concerns early in his career, and would continue returning to these problems

¹³ For a sense of Pound’s editorial influence on the poem, see Gallup.

throughout his life. Reading Pound's work alongside that of Carl Schmitt not only allows us to recognize the potential political implications of these two concerns, but also helps us to realize how they are connected. If, as Schmitt argues, sovereignty is antithetical to discourse, how can a poet, whose role is specifically to use language, be a sovereign? Pound's emphasis on parataxis provides the solution to this problem. By creating a new poetic language that denies the figurative, Pound rescues poetry from the flaws of discursivity by allowing it to approach the status of action.

In "A Retrospect," Pound urges poets to restrict themselves to the "direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective" (*Literary Essays* 3). The use of "treatment" – rather than "description" or "depiction" – to describe the act of writing suggests a physical action rather than a linguistic one. While Pound makes no distinction between "subjective" and "objective" topics, his use of the term "thing" suggests physical existence and favors the objective over the abstract. Pound's focus on the physical rather than the abstract continues throughout the essay. He argues that "the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol" (5, emphasis in original). By urging for the replacement of the symbolic function of language with the "natural object," Pound attempts to separate poetry from discursive language, which he associates with inefficiency and inaction. By eliminating poetry's symbolic elements, Pound removes poetry from the realm of language and transports it to the realm of physical action. This denial of the figurative represents an attempt to transform poetry from language to object and thus convert writing from a form of discussion to a form of action.

Artists as Sovereigns and the Implications for Language

Treating Schmitt's work as a lens through which to view Pound allows us to isolate these two elements of Pound's work and to recognize the relationship between them. Having established the association between Pound's construction of the artist as a sovereign and his creation of a concretized paratactic poetic style, I will now trace this relationship through his inter-war writing. I will first examine some early examples before transitioning to focus primarily on Pound's 1930s writing.

Pound was careful to separate the creation of art from the crafting of an argument. In "Patria Mia" (1913), he criticizes the endless conversation generated by discursive genres: "Argument begets but argument and reflective reason...begets either a state of argumentativeness or a desire for further information." Pound then contrasts these genres to the arts, which prevent the artist from being "drawn into argument or weakened by quibbling." For Pound, the arts are fundamentally opposed to discussion or debate: "For instance, you can wrangle with any statement about the relationship of Christianity (one undefinable term) with Socialism (another undefinable term). But with Sabatte's painting, '*Mort du premier Socialiste*,' you cannot argue" (*Selected Prose* 130). While the relationship between Christianity and Socialism seems to spark endless debate, a painting depicting the death of the first socialist is above argument. It is significant that Pound uses a painting – a concrete object that stands completely separate from language – as a general stand-in for the arts. There is a clear connection between the visual nature

of a painting and the “image” of Imagist poetry. By creating a concretized language made up of images, Pound grants poetry the status of object already held by the visual arts.¹⁴

Pound continues to construct poetry as an object in a 1915 letter to Harriet Monroe, and this construction has implications for artists’ ability to act as sovereigns: “Language is made out of concrete things. General expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act *by* the writer” (*Selected Letters* 91). While those who use “non-concrete terms” engage merely in discursive “talk,” those whose language remains true to its non-figurative purpose participate in a form of “creation.” Unlike the passive receptivity of the person who merely records their “reaction,” the true writer is engaged in the “creative act” of creating a “concrete thing.” Thus, by arguing that language is a concrete object, Pound aligns writing with action rather than discourse.

By constructing writing as a type of action, Pound allows for the argument that those who write have shown a capacity to act – an argument that redeems writers as active sovereigns. This construction of writing as action reappears in “A Retrospect,” in which Pound argues that those who have not demonstrated their capacity for action by writing should be considered incapable of judging poetry: “Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work” (*Literary Essays* 4).

¹⁴ Pound was not the only member of his circle to construct poetry as an object. Pound’s poetics were heavily influenced by the writing of T. E. Hulme, whose contribution to Imagism must be acknowledged. Not only does Hulme provide an early articulation of poetry as the accurate presentation of an image, but he also treats poetry as a concrete object with physical characteristics – it can be “all dry and hard” (Hulme 66). Hulme’s influence can be seen in *Blast*, where Pound describes Vorticism as an aesthetic dedicated to “bareness and hardness” (1.41).

Sixteen years later he repeats this advice nearly verbatim, warning against “accepting opinions” from “men who haven’t themselves produced notable work” (*ABC* 40). Not only does Pound fault the passivity of those who “accept” advice, but he also extends that accusation of passivity to those who have not acted by “produc[ing] notable work.” By casting those who have not written in a passive role, Pound constructs writing as active. He then expands his instruction to include a warning against “men who have not themselves taken the risk of printing the results of their own personal inspection and survey” (40). By constructing writing as a form of action and printing as a risk, Pound strengthens the connection between the artist or critic and the political sovereign.

Pound considers concrete language to be just as important for critics as it is for poets. Because critics engage in sovereign decision-making when evaluating works, they must therefore use clear, decisive language to communicate their evaluations. Pound warns of critics whose wordiness obfuscates their meaning: “I cannot repeat too often or too forcibly my caution against so-called critics who talk ‘all around the matter,’ and who do not define their terms.” These critics are contrasted with good critics who, instead of talking “all around the matter,” can decisively provide a simple list of “what writers he thinks are good writers” (*HtR* 53). By making this clear decision, critics are able to “take full responsibility” for their critical choices (54).

Appropriately for someone who values action, Pound is not content to let his convictions remain on the page. As noted above, when editing *The Waste Land*, Pound enacted his own aesthetic convictions by guiding Eliot toward a more streamlined,

concise version of the poem. But Pound does not merely promote his ideas to others; he also uses his prescriptions as a rubric for his own critical actions. In *How to Read*, Pound enacts his ideal of critical sovereignty by providing a list of authors he believes provide “the minimum basis for a sound and liberal education in letters” (*HtR* 50). Rather than attempting to justify his choices to others, he responds to his potential critics by emphasizing the finality of his decision and closing off the possibility of discussion or appeal: “All right, I have done it. I rest my case” (54). In his refusal to entertain discussion Pound acts as a cultural sovereign, deciding on matters of culture without input from others.

Pound’s valorization of artists and critics who demonstrate decisive action often transgresses the purely literary realm to include praising artists who have shown themselves to be capable of action in the political realm as well. In his essay on Cavalcanti (1934), Pound praises D’Annunzio for this propensity for physical action:

The only living artist who has ever taken a city or held up the diplomatic crapule at the point of machine guns, he is in a position to speak with more authority than a batch of neuroasthenic incompetents or of writers who never having swerved from their jobs, might be, or are, supposed by the scientists and the populace to be incapable of action. (*Literary Essays* 192)

For Pound, it is D’Annunzio’s history of violent physical action that grants him a “position to speak with more authority” than authors who have restricted themselves to the realm of language and thus to passivity. Pound defends his own political involvement in similar terms. In his 1934 essay “Mr. Eliot’s Looseness,” Pound takes issue with Eliot,

who had called Pound a “fanatic” for his staunch political opinions. Pound accuses Eliot of acting “as if any man who believed that his ideas SHOULD be put into ACTION, were by that sole fact a fanatic” (96). Pound opposes himself to Eliot by arguing that it is not enough to have ideas; they must also be put into action. This conviction makes sense for someone who believes that an artist should be a cultural sovereign, a role that is defined by action. In this sense, Pound is right to object to being called a “fanatic,” as he is simply following his aesthetic theories to their natural logical conclusion.

Pound’s conviction that aesthetic and political ideas should be put into action is one that he expressed relatively early in his career. In his 1912 review of *Credit Power and Democracy*, Pound argued that artists must recognize the fundamental connection between art and politics: “The symbolist position, artistic aloofness from world affairs, is no good now” (Qtd. in Feldman 11). Pound himself could never be accused of remaining removed from “world affairs.”

While it is tempting to consider Pound’s aesthetic project only in the abstract, which avoids engaging with the more distasteful elements of his oeuvre, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which Pound’s conception of language contributed directly to his understanding and support of fascist political projects. In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935), Pound invites his reader to “transpose [his] criteria” for judging art to the judgment of “ten years of fascism in Italy. And to the artifex” (92). The simultaneous composition of *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* and *The ABC of Reading* suggests that the “criteria” he refers to is the same criteria by which he judges poetry in the *ABC* –

parataxis, concreteness, and active language. As he often did, Pound follows his own advice and evaluates Mussolini in aesthetic terms. Pound praises several infrastructure projects that he believes illustrate Mussolini's successful leadership. Pound ends his list of Mussolini's accomplishments by crediting him with the creation of an "AWAKENED INTELLIGENCE in the nation and a new LANGUAGE" (73). By crediting Mussolini with the creation of a "new language," Pound likens him to the ideal poet. Pound frequently describes Mussolini as an artist. Pound cites Mussolini's concise language as evidence for his fitness to lead. In the *ABC of Economics* (1933), Pound claims that Mussolini is a highly intelligent man whose "aphorisms and perceptions" should be studied (*Selected Prose* 261). Mussolini's proclivity for "aphorisms" supports his intelligence and makes his writing as worthy of study as the works of any poet.

In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, Pound likens Mussolini's political speeches to the creations of an artist: "The more one examines the Milan Speech the more one is reminded of Brancusi, the stone blocks from which no error emerges, from whatever angle one look at them" (ix). By likening Mussolini to Brancusi – a sculptor known for his minimalist clean lines – Pound highlights Mussolini's verbal sparseness. In a 1934 letter to Hugo Fack, Pound once again compares Mussolini to a sculptor, describing his ability to communicate with the masses as a form of artistic genius, "just as Gaudier's or Brancusi's sense of form was and is genius" (*Economic Correspondence* 124). The comparison with sculpture also equates Mussolini's speech with the creation of a concrete object, rather than with the more abstract art of rhetoric. Pound depicts

Mussolini as a sculptor of words, and these verbal creations allow him to in turn become a sculptor of the masses and of the Italian government.¹⁵ Pound considered Mussolini to be a great artist – an “artifex” – and therefore all the more fit to be a sovereign (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* 33).

Although Pound especially admired Mussolini, he did make similar claims about other political figures. Pound praised Hitler’s intelligence, calling him “one of the clearest brains yet produced in Europe” and cited his “amazing faculty to get the BASE idea, of a subject the root idea of a problem” as evidence of that intelligence (Qtd. in Feldman 134). Pound’s praise of Hitler’s clear mind and ability to cut through dense ideas to a single meaning echoes his description of the ideal artist, who cuts through verbal flourishes to present the precise nature of an image. In “Infamy of Taxes,” published in the British Union of Fascists’ journal *Action* in 1938, Pound makes the connection between Hitler and the ideal sovereign artist more explicit. Pound described *Mein Kampf* as a “book full of what seemed to the Anglo-Saxon public to be ranting and rhetoric but which the event has proved to be a work of genius, the language needed and effective to stir the German people into reorganizing against their enemies” (Qtd in Feldman 52). Pound rejects the idea that Hitler’s writing is incoherent, unorganized

¹⁵ Pound was not alone in portraying Mussolini as a sculptor of the state, and in fact may have been echoing Mussolini’s own descriptions of himself. In a 1932 interview with Emil Ludwig, Mussolini described the “masses” as “like wax in my hands,” and said that he felt toward them how a “modeler feels for the clay he is moulding.” He summarized his interactions with the Italian people thusly: “Everything turns upon one’s ability to control the masses like an artist” (Qtd. Feldman 26). This demonstrates that the conflation of artist and sovereign was not an idiosyncrasy of Pound’s, but a widespread feature of Italian fascism.

“ranting” or wordy, obfuscating “rhetoric.” Instead, he argues that Hitler’s prose is “effective” because it can “stir” the people to act. It is Hitler’s use of active language that Pound presents as evidence of both his intelligence and fitness to serve as sovereign.

In his praise of both Mussolini and Hitler, Pound notes their use of the same non-discursive language that he also praised earlier in poets and critics. Prescribing concretized language to sovereigns, either literal or cultural, allows Pound to justify the speech of those whose role requires that they do not speak, only act. If a sovereign or critic uses language that falls on the discursive side of the discourse-action dichotomy, they risk being drawn into discussion and losing their ability to make decisions in moments of exception. Because a sovereign’s use of language is intimately related to his ability to lead, matters of aesthetics can directly affect national wellbeing.

Pound argued that the widespread use of imprecise and wordy language degrades the nation, eventually leading to its destruction. In his essay “Harold Munro” (1932), he advocates for the importance of “active literature” to the health of the nation: “for if its literature be not active, a nation will die at the top. When literature is not active; when the word is not constantly striving toward precision, the nation decays in its head.” The “active” literature that will preserve the nation is characterized by the same precise, concrete language that Pound prescribes to poets and critics. Without this language, the nation will decay “in its head,” suggesting both that this decay is primarily intellectual and that it will spring from those “at the top” of the socio-political hierarchy. As such, Pound considers language important not only for poets and writers, but also for political

sovereigns. This is consistent with Pound's tendency to blur the line between sovereigns and artists and to describe politics in aesthetic terms. Indeed, given that political sovereigns are defined by their position on the action side of the discourse-action dichotomy, it follows that, for Pound, a sovereign loses his sovereignty and his ability uphold the health of the nation the moment he begins to use language that is neither "active" nor "constantly striving toward precision" (*Polite Essays* 5).

While Pound believed that the health of the state depended on the language of political sovereigns, they were not the only people whose words had the power to shape national destinies. Pound argued that "and precise use of words" – whether by politicians or artists – was "bound in the long run to be useful to the state and the world at large" (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* 74). In his 1935 essay "We Have Had No Wars," Pound argues that efforts to make language more precise would positively affect the nation: "Clean the word, clearly define its borders and health pervades the whole human congeries" (*Polite Essays* 52). Pound's description of a "clean" language with well-defined borders – metaphors that blur the line between language and the state – suggests parallels between his aesthetic vision and nationalist domestic policy. Regardless of whether or not Pound intended for his readers to make that connection, he certainly establishes the idea that any attempt to bring cleanliness and order to language has parallel effects on the state.

Conversely, Pound believed that if language becomes verbose and ornate, the nation will suffer: "Rome rose through the idiom of Caesar, Ovid, and Tacitus, she

declined in a welter of rhetoric, the diplomat's 'language to conceal thought,' and so forth" (*ABC* 33). By listing both Caesar and Ovid, Pound demonstrates that the language of both politicians and artists, of political and cultural sovereigns, are equally vital in maintaining the health of the nation. By crediting the "idiom" of Caesar and Ovid with the "rise" of Rome, Pound once again conflates short, precise language with action. The efficiency of the "idiom" translates to active political life and the creation of a nation. This active, direct language stands in contrast to "rhetoric" and discursive language, which erodes sovereignty and leads to the downfall of civilizations. Pound's conflation of the health of the arts with the health of the nation and his tendency to blur the lines between artist and sovereign necessitate scholarly engagement with the political implications of his aesthetics.

In *The Poetics of Fascism*, Paul Morrison argues that Pound's "willingness to explain all...in terms of writing or rhetoric betrays the aestheticizing habits of a man interested preeminently in the arts" (59). But while Morrison attributes this aestheticizing tendency to Pound's career as a poet, I argue that it is a commonality that he shares with other fascists, including those like Schmitt who had no particular commitment to the arts. By reading Pound alongside Schmitt, we can see that an obsession with symbols and the attempt to control them and even destroy them is not unique to Pound. Instead, I argue that this is a defining feature of fascist ideology.

Pound and Schmitt share a dislike of Romanticism and the indulgent wordiness they associate with it. They both view Romantic prolixity as a sign of incompetence and

unintelligence, and they believe linguistic concision to be a necessary condition for coherent thought. More importantly, both Pound and Schmitt consider discussion and wordiness to be indicators of a lack of sovereignty. Those who engage in superfluous conversation avoid their sovereign duty to make decisions. Schmitt and Pound believe the democratic diffusion of responsibility throughout a group violates the definition of both a sovereign and an artist because it denies their essential individuality and the importance of personalism in decision-making.

The numerous similarities between Schmitt and Pound provide a framework for evaluating Pound's poetics. In this light, Pound's repeated exhortations urging poets to uphold standards of clarity and efficiency reveal themselves as an attempt to separate poetry from the faults of discursivity and discussion. By erasing the symbolic and the figurative from poetry, Pound attempts to remove poetry from the linguistic realm and to redefine writing as a form of action befitting a sovereign. Schmitt provides the tools necessary to understand the relationship between Pound's views on the role of the artist, his poetic prescriptions, and his support of fascism.

The similarities between Schmitt and Pound urge us to reevaluate Pound's aesthetic project and to resist attempts to separate Pound's poetic and political activities. The notion of separation is further complicated by the nearly simultaneous composition of works like *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* and *The ABC of Reading*. Indeed, a clear trajectory can be drawn from Pound's earliest articulations of the value of direct language to his later support of Mussolini and other fascist leaders. This continuity makes it

impossible to overlook Pound's political commitments in favor of his poetry. As Pound himself argued, "You forgive a poet his sins for the sake of his virtues, 'because he hath loved much.' But it is consummate slovenliness of general criticism to see no flaw in the idol merely because *numen inest*" ("Hark to Sturge Moore" 142). If we are to take Pound at his word, then in the case of Pound himself, whose "sins" and "virtues" spring from the same place, it would be doubly wrong to gloss over either.

The similarities between Schmitt and Pound have broader implications than the reevaluation of Pound's poetics. They also reveal the fundamental importance of aesthetics to fascist ideology. If fascism is indeed a "revolution in...representation" (Morrison 50) or an "introduction of aesthetics into political life" (Benjamin 241), as many have claimed, then that is the case partially because fascists are actively concerned with representation. Pound's clear articulation of political problems in aesthetic terms provides a framework for evaluating the ways in which other fascist writers discuss politics in terms of language. Pound is certainly not alone in connecting politics to language, but he is unique in how explicitly he makes that connection. As such, reading Pound's poetics in terms of Schmittian sovereignty not only reveals the connection between his aesthetic and political ideas, but also it allows us to see the ways in which fascists appropriate aesthetic theories and uses them to their own ends. As such, this essay's mutual explication of Schmitt and Pound provides a model for further investigations of both the political implications of modernist aesthetic practices and the aesthetic dimensions of fascist political ideologies.

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